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The Sociological Benefits of a Parish Survey

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**THE SOCIOLOGICAL BENEFITS
OF A PARISH SURVEY**

by

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for the Degree of Master of Social Administration
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INTRODUCTION

In recent years a parish survey has become a more common practice than it was twenty years ago. Pastors are realizing the great benefits which may be derived from parish surveys. They not only furnish the pastor with statistical data, but through it he has presented for him a very definite picture of the existing spiritual, social and economic conditions among his flock.

In order to produce the desired results a survey must be one which is well regulated, conducted by properly trained and experienced workers. The survey results must be intelligently and properly interpreted.

Since there are in existence several Religious Communities of Women who specialize in this type of work, there is no reason for neglecting the parish survey.

The following material discusses and interprets a typical parish survey. It shows how the results being properly interpreted can prove to be very beneficial to the pastor in his priestly labors.

In Chapter One will be presented a historical background of the parish and the parish survey. This discussion will include the importance of a survey and the various techniques which may be employed in making a parish survey.

Chapter Two tells about a typical parish being surveyed by a group

of experienced workers. The survey and an interpretation of its results are discussed.

In Chapter Three it is shown how the priests of the parish in study have applied the results of the survey. Several of the programs which began as a result of the survey are discussed and these results are presented.

Some recommendations and evaluations are made in Chapter Four, which is followed by the Conclusion and Summary.

For obvious reasons a fictitious name has been used for the parish in study.

It is fitting that a particular expression of gratitude be extended to the Reverend Ralph A. Gallagher, S.J. without whose help this work would have been impossible. The writer is especially indebted to Reverend Mother Mary Gerald, O. P. for providing opportunity for advanced education and giving assistance and encouragement during the study.

CHAPTER I

PARISH SURVEY DEFINED

A parish is a man-made structure, developed for the practical purpose of administration and maintained as an operating unit within the hierarchy and social structure of the Church. Professor John Donovan defines the Catholic parish as:

A real social group composed of the Catholic clergy, religious, and laity which are within certain territorial boundaries and who share a unity founded on common religious beliefs and who participate in socio-religious relationships institutionally defined by the parent-organization of the Church.¹

Thus, we find that the parish is a human institution in the sense that it is the result of the Church's administrative experience and genius. But we must remember that a parish does not appear automatically whenever a group of Catholics settle in any given locality. Since the Sacred Consistorial of 1919, the parish no longer becomes a parish by the simple matter of the will of the people, but rather by an explicit decree of the Bishop. The decree of 1919 gave more minute details when it insisted that

¹John Donovan, "The Social Structure of the Catholic Parish", a paper read at the 10th Annual Convention of the American Catholic Social Society, St. Louis, Mo., 1948.

. . . a canonical parish must have not only fixed boundaries and an appointed pastor but also a permanent residence for the priest and the assurance of sufficient income to support the parish.²

Since this edict, each newly formed parish must now have a decree of erection from the Bishop of the diocese so that now the parish does not come into existence by the will of the people, but only by the explicit ruling of the Bishop.

The parish as a unit is best defined by Canon Law as follows:

The territory of every diocese is to be divided into distinct territorial units; and each unit is to have a special church with a designated people, and a special rector is to be given charge over it as the proper pastor for the necessary cure of souls . . . such units are parishes.³

This statement fixes the purpose of the parish as the "cure of souls". It designates the proper authority, the pastor. By provision for the specifications of territory and membership, it differentiates the parish from other ecclesiastical units. And by recognition of the most important material property, the parish church, it implies the continuity and permanence of the Church's mission in the community. Since the parish is an institution of the Church, it is this legal definition which determines its nature.

As defined in Canon Law, each parish must have its pastor. The pastor is the official head and spiritual advisor and is appointed to his office by the Bishop and is the representative of the Bishop of the parish. Canon Law prescribes the duties of the pastor to be:

²C. J. Nuesse and T. J. Harte, The Sociology of the Parish, Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1951, 6.

³Ibid., 5 - 6.

The supervisor of the faith and morals of his parishioners, the public celebration of Mass, the administration of the Sacraments, and the solemn witnessing of marriages, the instruction in Christian doctrine and the like.⁴

It is to the priests that the people look for guidance and leadership. To the parishioner, the rectory is the "power house" of the social and cultural activities of the parish. Although the spiritual must be the dominant factor, nevertheless, the social and cultural way of life will lead it and make it flourish.

Since neither the parish nor the parish priest was known during the first three centuries of the Church's existence, it is evident that the parochial system cannot claim origin in Christ, at least in the same respect that the episcopacy and the papacy can.

Although parishes had existed in the Fourth Century in the City of Rome, it was not until a century later that, at the direction of Pope St. Gregory I, a parish emerged in the first sense with a parish priest as its pastor. Previously, Bishops were appointed "pastors" of each church and they in turn appointed "country bishops" or "travelling priests" to administer to the rural churches and chapels in their respective territories. It was soon discovered that priests appointed by the Bishop, and subject to him, was a far better arrangement. Consequently, the parish priest became the delegate and representative of the Bishop of the diocese. Thus, the modern parish dates back to the Sixth Century, for at that time the parish was operating within

⁴ Bernard Kelley, The Functions Reserved to Pastors, The Catholic University of America Canon Law Studies, No. 250, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1947, 4.

defined limits. The parish was also administered by a resident pastor with assistance from a group of clerics.

It was not until the Twelfth Century that the term "diocese" became widely used. Previously, the term had applied to any province of the Empire. The use of the term with reference to an Episcopal See was not initiated until the Twelfth Century. The general division of urban areas of the Church did not become evident until after the Council of Trent in 1545. In spite of the fact that this Council explicitly decreed as universal law that all cities be divided into parishes, many Italian cities did not comply with this ruling until nearly the Seventeenth Century.⁵ Since that time the new code of Canon Law has made it an absolute law that all dioceses must have both their urban and rural territories organized on the parochial scheme.⁶

The present picture of parishes and dioceses in the United States is the result of a long series of events in the social structure of the Church. In view of all the centuries in which the Catholic Church has existed, the present parish standard is comparatively new. Prior to the Revolutionary War there was no organized Catholic Church in America. Actually, the Catholic Church consisted of scattered missions in the colonies which were under the direct ecclesiastical control of the Bishops of Spain, England or France. It was in the English colony of Maryland where the Catholic Church in the United States had its foundation. Until 1784 the mission territory of this country

⁵Rev. John J. Harbrecht, S.T.D., The Lay Apostle, B. Herder Book Company, St. Louis, 18 - 19.

⁶Neusse and Harte, Ibid., 6.

was under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of the London District. With the end of the Revolutionary War, it became apparent that a separation from the mother country was necessary and, by an order of an independent American Episcopal authority, the erection of the first diocese in America was established. This diocese, under Bishop John Carroll, was established in 1789. It was known as the Diocese of Baltimore. Bishop Carroll became the first Episcopal head of the Catholic Church in the United States.⁷

The early parish organizations in America grew much the same as in every mission land. Each missionary priest established small chapels, missions, or gathering places for the residents of the area. As the missions grew, however, and their territorial boundaries became limited, resident priests were assigned and the missions became known as "quasi-parishes".⁸

Because the Catholic Church in the United States was under the administration of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, no parish could advance beyond this "quasi-parish" status. In 1908, the Apostolic Constitution of Pius X, known as the Sapienti Consilio, made this proclamation which officially placed the Catholic Church in this country under the general law of the Church.

The first parish surveys were made in this country in the Nineteenth Century. Since the end of World War I, parish surveys have been steadily increasing, reaching their peak in the 1930's. It is a known fact that parish surveys are essential to the life of a functioning parish. Because of the present mode of life in America, the personal contact between the priest and

⁷Ibid., 45.

⁸Ibid., 46.

parishioners is diminishing. Through a survey, in the form of a census, direct and personal contact between parishioners and priest takes place. In a comprehensive study made on the subject of surveys, Pauline V. Young tells us:

In a survey we are concerned with: (1) current or immediate conditions, (2) of a social pathological nature, (3) having definite geographic limits, (4) having definite social implications and significance, (5) being capable of measurement and (6) of comparison with situations which may be accepted as a model, and (7) being concerned with the formulation of a constructive program of social advance.⁹

While this finding was not made of parish surveys directly, it can be stated that a survey as applied to a parish census is a thorough examination into the social, economic and religious conditions existing in a specific parish at a specific time with a view towards remedying the aspects that do not conform to Holy Mother Church teachings. Technically, there is a vast difference between a parish survey and a parish research. The former is made with the purpose of describing the situation in a given parish here and now. The latter is concerned with

. . . a disinterested exploration into the uncharted regions for the purpose of arriving at the principles or laws relative to the behavior of persons, groups, or institutions.¹⁰

A parish survey is nothing new. In the past twenty-five years, parish surveys have made notable progress. According to George A. Kelly, in his paper "A Parish Census", census-taking is

. . . a rare phenomenon in American parish life. However, some pastors have made it a regular activity in their parishes.¹¹

⁹Pauline V. Young, Scientific Social Surveys and Research, Prentice-Hall, New York, 1942, 55.

¹⁰Nuesse and Harte, Ibid., 263.

¹¹Ibid., 234.

It must be admitted, however, that the number of pastors who utilize the advantage of the parish survey are far in the minority. The main reason for the lack of this activity can be attributed to the ignorance on the part of the pastors as to the strict definition of the parish survey and the benefits derived therefrom. One purpose of the survey is to furnish the pastor with the exact statistics concerning his parishioners and the fulfillment of their religious obligations. Because the parish is the social and organizational unit in the Church, it is readily seen that any study of the unit, ad hoc, involves personal contact. The importance of a parish survey was emphasized in a directive with regard to census-taking which was issued to Bishops by the Holy See:

To make the pastoral ministry by this means (the regular parish census) even more fruitful, the Sacred Consistorial of the Council has instructed me to remind the Bishops of this country of their obligation to have parish priests keep an accurate and current census of the faithful entrusted to their care.¹²

The main purpose of a parish survey is to discover the significant religious, social and economic conditions in a parish. The pastor must know the existing social and cultural life of the parish, in order to fulfill the various services necessary to his parishioners. If he is to guide and direct those under his care, he must have an understanding of their needs. It is to the pastor's advantage to know how the parishioners have adjusted themselves in their spiritual life to the economic conditions resulting from low income, unemployment, and old age. Unfavorable economies result from such conditions. To answer these needs, to plan a rehabilitative program, the pastor must have

¹²T. Lincoln Bouscaren, S.J., The Canon Law Digest, Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1943, II, 147.

and make use of the parish survey. He thus gains a true picture of the parish.

The parish census is not an end in itself, but rather just the ground work for social reconstruction in the parish. The economic status of the parish is closely related to the practice of religion. (This factor will be handled in succeeding chapters of this thesis.) When this fact has been recognized and accepted by the parish priest, we can expect an even greater increase in parish surveys in the future.

A parish survey is taken for one or more of three purposes: (1) the compilation of membership statistics (this is called a Statistical Census); (2) the provision of data for scientific research (this is known as Research Census); or (3) the diagnosis and correction of religious conditions in the parish (this is called a Therapeutic Census). The last named is the one most preferred by the pastor. This particular type of census is made with the purpose of solidifying the parishioners into a strong religious unit and strengthening them for greater religious devotion.

The modern Catholic family has tended to become estranged from the Church. With modern living the way it is, parishioners are almost strangers to the parish rectory and church. A parish census, therefore, will tend to reclaim some of these "strangers" for the Church. Because the parishioners will not come to the pastor, it is his duty to go to the parishioners.

It is impossible to understand why people become negligent in the practice of their religion under conditions of modern urban living without knowing something of their social and cultural background, the environment in which they live, the social and economic pattern under which they function.¹³

¹³Gerald J. Schnepf, Leakage From A Catholic Parish, Catholic University Press, Washington, D.C., 1942, II, 28.

A parish survey will obtain information and will offer some sort of an explanation to the reasons for this leakage. It tends to bring together the parishioner and parish priest through closer personal contact, contact in their own houses, which today has been lost. They enjoy their role away from the Church because they are able to live in their own way with no interference from the pastor or the Church.

In the eyes of a pastor, the purpose of a survey consists of . . . reclaiming lost sheep, validating the invalid marriages, converting the unconverted, instructing the ignorant, leading the lukewarm and indifferent Catholics back to the Sacraments, encouraging the faithful and inspiring them to a greater devotion.¹¹

The completion of a parish survey is but the initial step toward establishing a firmer bond between the pastor and his people. Having completed the parish survey, the pastor is then in a position to see from the facts in hand what steps must be taken toward rehabilitating those who either had defected or failed to live up to their obligations as Catholics. Finally, accumulation of the data from research and a careful evaluation of the findings can be applied and recognized as an important part of pastoral theology. The parish, therefore, can be far better served by pastors and sociologists alike because of these surveys. Uncovering and understanding the factors which contribute to the modern parish will be an end result.

The parish of today has so expanded that its function now has a broader purpose than just the spiritual life of its members. Today, the

¹¹Nuesse and Harte, Ibid., 234.

parish is concerned with many phenomena of daily life, such as maternity groups, libraries, social centers, labor schools, credit unions and programs for adult education. Not only is the modern parish concerned with the spiritual well-being of its members, but also with their temporal welfare. Realizing that the temporal welfare, as well as spiritual, of its members is of vital concern to the Church, the parish church in the United States is succeeding where the parish church of Europe failed.

Holy Mother Church recognizes in the family the basic social institution. It is so that she may cluster her children about the sacramental life of the Church that she includes in the pastoral function a true knowledge of their condition, materially as well as spiritually, insofar as living a full Christian life is concerned. It is believed that the faith of the people, even where there are dormant Catholics, will welcome an interest in their welfare, if it is genuine and brings with it God's ministry.

In the taking of a parish census, therefore, the subject matter of which is at one and the same time so sacred to the individual and yet so necessary to the pastor, the utmost kindness, prudence and courtesy should prevail on the part of the census-taker, if he wishes to be of any tangible assistance to his parishioners. When the pastor himself is prevented from assuming an active part in the project, he may delegate the duty to those he feels qualified to gather the information. The nature of the work, and the fact that it is intended for the purpose of bringing pastor and parishioner closer together, should not be overlooked by the appointed census-taker.

It is quite apparent, in the taking of a census, that lay people are

not suited for the work. Information pertinent to a census is of such highly personal and confidential nature that parishioners are quite naturally reluctant to discuss their private lives with a lay member of the parish. Ideal census-takers are the religious -- sisters and priests. They are well-trained and will devote full time to the task. There are several Communities of Sisters who are thoroughly trained in this type of census work. Well-known among these are the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart, and the Parish Visitors. One of the most outstanding advantages in using sisters for parish survey work is told in the words of Mother Mary Terese Tallon:

The census visitation of families . . . embodies not only a systematic study of parish conditions but a veritable missionary crusade of Catholic action. In this family visitation, the wayward are instructed and reclaimed to the Church, faithful Catholics are exhorted to become fervent and apostolic . . . all are urged to contribute by personal interest and service to the upbuilding of the Catholic cause.¹⁵

If this task is performed by sisters, care must be taken to see that it does not end there, or the purpose of taking a census would be frustrated. The sisters obtain necessary information, discover the leakage, and the priests do the repair work. Although there can be no question as to the efficiency in taking the census, or the merits of a census as taken by sisters, because they are so few in number, the task still falls back upon the parish priests. Likewise, there can be no comparison of the benefits derived from a priestly visit to the home of his parishioners.

With the delegated visitor, the first approach is of utmost impor-

¹⁵Mother Mary Terese Tallon, The Book of Customs, New York, 1936, IV, 43.

tance. Opportunities for great good may hinge upon it, to say nothing about the closing of this avenue toward any improved parish relationship. The report must be such that it will invite confidence without seeking it, establish a mutual understanding and relationship, and leave the parishioner with a feeling of deeper security in the closer presence and friendly interest of his or her Father.

We do not propose in this attempt to discuss the details of the census, but wish to confine our thoughts to certain factors in the technique to secure the desired information.

One of the requisites of a good parish survey is the proper choice of words used in the interview. Ambiguous words which could be given double-meaning answers should be avoided. This is particularly true when the inquiry pertains to Mass attendance and regularity to the Sacraments.

In taking a parish census, one of the first steps necessary is to obtain a map of the territorial boundaries of the parish. It should be decided in advance if every home in the parish is to be contacted or merely the homes of the Catholics in the parish. To obtain a really true picture of the parish, all homes--Catholic and non-Catholic--should be covered.

The next question is to decide just what type of census will be pursued. The two most common types are the individual- and family-card. With a family-card, however, it is a little more complex. The advantage of a family-card is to picture readily the religious status of each family as a unit. On the cards will be a series of questions concerning the Sacraments, Mass attendance, membership in various parish organizations, employment record,

education and marital status. On the card the markings could be made through a code system; i.e., red would indicate an invalid marriage; green, no Easter Duty; blue, attendance at another parish; and so forth. Of paramount importance in the survey is the subject of economic status of the members of the parish. This fact is the most important, for it has been proved that the economic status is closely related to the practice of religion. Here again, the choice of words used in the interview and throughout the survey is most important. By prudent questioning, the visitor may learn the status of the family by asking whether the home is owned or rented, whether the parishioner is a telephone subscriber, whether he owns an automobile, whether there is more than one wage earner in the family, and so on. By grouping all this information on charts after the survey is completed, the priest can readily determine the over-all picture and classify the members of his parish into various classes relating to the economic status.

While the one side of the card will contain various questions asked of each parishioner, the reverse side may contain a few written comments by the visitor as a guide for the pastor in his work with the individual parishioners and as a guide in determining the pressing problems of his parish. This side of the card may also contain remarks by the visitor in regard to some of the answers (such as an obvious exaggeration or a deliberate attempt to falsify and misconstrue an answer).

In conclusion, the techniques used in a parish survey would be the proper alignment of a series of questions designed to bring out the most important factors to the pastor, with the least possible number of questions put forth.

CHAPTER II

A PARISH SURVEY

St. John's Parish, located in a typical industrial city in Midstate, is an average parish in growth and development. Since its location is far removed from the heart of the city, it has grown steadily.

The community in which St. John's is located has a good reputation and is held with respect in general. This is true also of the parish, it is in good standing and is held in esteem in community and religious circles.

St. John's is located in a good transportation area. There is a bus line which passes in front of the church and beyond parish boundaries, running east and west. One block to the east is another bus line, running north beyond the northern-most boundary. And four blocks to the west there is cross transportation, running north and south beyond the parish boundaries. This affords those without automobiles (and they are in the minority) ample opportunity to attend religious functions and parish activities during the week, as well as on Sunday.

For the most part, the parishioners are home owners. The many prairies which prevailed in the neighborhood during the past fifteen years are no longer apparent. The trend to move to the periphery of the city has affected and influenced the population of St. John's. Apartment buildings are infrequent.

In most American communities the basis for social and economic status rests in the occupation of the head of the family. Close to 50 per cent of the men in the parish are employed by the city as policemen and firemen. The others are engaged in such occupations as mailmen, teachers, small store managers, office employees and laborers. Few mothers are employed, and those who are employed are engaged in the teaching profession.

The predominant national descent in St. John's Parish is Irish; though most of the people are of Irish descent, there are many who came directly from Ireland. The Germans form the next largest percentage, while the English, Italian and Polish are greatly in the minority.

The families in St. John's Parish vary in number. There are from four to six children in most homes. A wide range in age groups prevails among the parishioners. There are many young married couples and many of grand-parent age. As would be expected, the children range in age from pre-school to college.

Parish property includes one square city block on one side of the street and one-half block opposite the front of the church, which is a paved parking lot and is used for carnival activities every spring. On the north side, which would be the front of the block, are situated the "old" and "new" churches. The older building was erected in 1915 and used as the main church until the new building was completed in 1937. At the present time, the older building is being used for a parish hall. It has been remodeled and made very attractive. There are two Masses offered every Sunday in the basement of the hall. The new church holds approximately 900 people.

On the east side of the block there are two buildings, the Junior and Senior Schools. There are four grades, consisting of two rooms each, in both buildings. The south side of the block provides ample playground space for the school children.

Situated on the west side of the block is a two-story convent, which houses the nineteen sisters who teach in the school. The rectory is occupied by the pastor, three assistants, and a housekeeper who has her living quarters on the first floor rear. The school and church engineer, his wife and five children occupy an apartment above the church hall. Everything concerning the plant presents a picture of comfort and efficiency. At present, the building program is complete and there is no church debt.

According to the survey report for 1950 there were 2,286 families in St. John's Parish. There were 399 singles of adult age. Of this number, there were 47 who claimed attendance in another parish. The reasons for not attending St. John's was either because of the great distance they lived from the church or a preference for another parish.

The survey was conducted by four sisters who have had training and experience in parish visiting. The survey was completed after a period of four months, during which time every home within the parish boundaries was visited. The technique used was the personal interview. The priest announced in church on two previous Sundays that the parish was going to be surveyed and asked the people to respond accurately to the interview.

The person most frequently contacted was the lady of the house and she was most likely to give accurate information. If there was no one at home

at the time the sisters called, a note was made and a second call undertaken at the home on a later date. If both parents worked, arrangements were made to hold the interview at a time convenient for all parties concerned.

Individual cards were used for each visit. In recording information thereon, an "X" would indicate positive answers and an "O" would mean negative answers. Small colored clips are fastened to the upper right hand corner of each card to indicate its status: red, a marriage case; green, attending another parish; blue, no Easter duty; and so on. Clips are used in preference to colored markings, because they can be removed easily when the condition has changed. In recording divorces, the ones which are an impediment to the validation of the present marriage are separated from those which are not.

The marriage case record is divided into two parts, Catholic and mixed. Where two Catholics are married out of the church, it is recorded as a CATHOLIC marriage case. Where a Catholic is married to a non-Catholic out of the church, it is recorded as a MIXED marriage case.

A sample card form is outlined in Exhibits A and B.¹⁶

A sample copy of the report sheet which was given to the pastor upon the completion of the project, entitled "Religious Survey Report", is outlined in Exhibit C.¹⁷

¹⁶ Courtesy of the Dominican Sisters of Parish Visitation, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹⁷ Courtesy of the Dominican Sisters of Parish Visitation, Cincinnati, Ohio (with permission from the pastor of St. John's Parish).

Family Name _____		Telephone _____					
Residence _____		Date _____					
Age	Married	Bapt.	First Comm.	Con- firmed	Easter Comm.	Mass	School
	Single						
Father							
Mother							
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							
8.							
9.							
10.							
Nationality:							

Exhibit A. FRONT SIDE OF CARD

Married Before _____ Date _____ Place (Church, City, State) _____	
(All marriage cases are written up on this side of the card)	
Occupation	Env's Convert Sodality Remarks
Father	
Mother	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

RELIGIOUS SURVEY REPORT

Pastor _____ Street _____ City _____

Parish _____ Date _____

Statistical Data:

Visits	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	4,722
Cards	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2,685
Families	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2,286
Singles	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	399

Data on Sacraments:

Marriage Cases	Catholic	.	.	.	.	35
	Mixed	.	.	.	.	90
Mixed Marriages	(No complications)	.	.	237		
Divorces	Impediments.	.	.	.	56	
	Others	.	.	.	.	0
Separations	.	.	.	.	.	36
No Baptism	.	.	.	.	.	36
Baptized Protestant	.	.	.	.	.	44
No Easter Duty.	.	.	.	.	.	249
No First Communion	.	.	.	.	.	40
No Confirmation	.	.	.	.	.	74

Data of Attendance:

Attending other parishes	.	.	.	.	.	47
Attending Public High	.	.	.	.	.	115
Attending Public Grade	.	.	.	.	.	193

Submitted by _____
 Date _____

CHAPTER III

BENEFITS DERIVED FROM THE SURVEY

Priests in St. John's Parish studied the existing situations which the survey report unfolded. They felt that there was an immediate need for spiritual, social and economical rehabilitation among their charges. They decided that the three, spiritual, social, and economic, could work "hand-in-hand". The primary concern was regarding the marriage cases. The figures relating to the marriage cases and the lack of reception of the sacraments were closely allied. Although the number of marriage cases was not great in proportion to the number of families in the parish, it was great enough to call for immediate and careful attention.¹

Upon further investigation and study of the family cards, it was discovered that the unbaptized children (those who had not received their first holy communion and were not attending parochial school) were for the most part children belonging to parents involved in a marriage case, a divorce, or a mixed marriage.

The numbers which appear on the report sheet (Exhibit C) are the results of the survey which is being used for this research.

In the existing 125 marriage cases, both parties in thirty-five instances were Catholic. Of the remaining 90, only one of the parties was

¹Exhibit C, 23.

Catholic. There were impediments in all of the 56 divorce cases.

The pastor immediately sent out form letters to all the parties who were involved in a marriage case. In these letters, he invited the couples to call at the rectory for an interview or, if they preferred, one of the priests would call at their home. A similar letter was sent to those involved in a divorce case.

Over a period of four months 82 responses were received at the rectory. Some of the parties answered the letter by mail, requesting an interview, while others called on the telephone to make an appointment. Twenty-six requested that one of the priests call at their home. Over the same length of time twenty-six of the parties involved in a divorce case requested interviews. With all four of the priests making investigations, it took two months to complete the interviews.

Through the interviews, the priests learned that approximately 35 of these 82 marriage cases existed either because of neglect on the part of the Catholic party or because of lack of religious instruction. Thirty-nine per cent of the children who were attending public schools, who had not received the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion or Confirmation were children of parents who were parties of an invalid mixed marriage, or a valid mixed marriage in which one of the parents did not understand his obligations properly.

In several instances the non-Catholic party was willing to be exposed to the basic fundamentals of our faith. Thus, an opportunity was presented which afforded occasion for the first concrete step in the rehabili-

tation program. It was decided that one way to reach the non-Catholic parties of mixed marriages and the poorly informed Catholic parties would be through an instruction class, better termed "Information Club". This would be organized with the assistance of the parish societies.

At a meeting with the Holy Name Society, it was announced that an information class was being organized. If they knew of anyone who should be contacted and who resented the approach of a stranger, they were asked to visit that person and invite him to the first information club meeting, to accompany him if it would make it easier.

At the same time a similar announcement was made at the meeting of the Women's Auxiliary. Form letters again were sent to the parties of the mixed valid and mixed invalid marriages inviting the non-Catholic or both parties to attend the first meeting of the Information Club.

It was planned that in this way the poorly instructed Catholic would benefit greatly by his attendance at the meetings, and the non-Catholic could air his views and criticisms, if he had any, concerning our faith. The meetings were to be very informal so the members could become acquainted and to make it easier for them to discuss their particular difficulties.

The attendance at the meetings held every two weeks during the spring in which this study was being made, was very promising. In most instances, the non-Catholic showed interest in becoming a Catholic. The pastor made available several books that were understandable and many pamphlets which contained material pertinent to the discussions. At different times, guest speakers addressed the group and permitted the members to ask questions. At no time was

any mention made of admitting them into the church.

Regarding spontaneous participation in these question-and-answer sessions, a priest in charge of the group stated: "It was very noticeable at several meetings at which Catholics were in attendance, that the non-Catholics were not so anxious to take part in discussions as they were when they were among those who shared their problems."²

Some of the members made appointments with the priest and, at that time, expressed a desire to take instructions. They were permitted to do so from any of the priests, not necessarily the one in charge of the Information Club. However, it was noted that about 50% of them did chose this priest.

The meetings were discontinued during the summer months. They were resumed in October. Once again the attendance at the meetings was gratifying. Some of the non-Catholics brought friends or acquaintances who were curious or "just interested" in the Catholic Religion.

In general, it could be said that the Information Club was successful and fulfilled its purpose among the laity. Not all the members who attended became Catholics, but those who didn't take instructions gave up their hostilities and had a more friendly attitude toward the Church. The largest number in attendance at any meeting was thirty-five.

Out of the 193 children attending public schools, 76 were of parents involved in a mixed marriage. In the fall, following the establishment of the

² An interview with the priest in charge of the "Information Club".

Information Club, forty-eight of these children registered in the parish school. Thirty-five of the 115 attending public high schools were from homes where there was a mixed marriage. Sixteen of these youngsters registered in Catholic high school.

The pastor felt that a vital step had been taken to solve the mixed marriage problem in existence among his flock. Although it wasn't a 100% response, it was enough to give the priests of St. John's Parish encouragement for further work in the field. So as not to lose contact with these people, they were invited and encouraged to join the parish societies.

Not much could be done in regard to the divorce cases. There were 56 cases on record and all of them had impediments. The parties involved were interviewed by the priests. In three instances they refused an interview, saying that they had discussed the matter several times and as there was nothing gained they didn't see any reason for further discussion. Since none of the parties interviewed would consent to take the necessary steps to remove the existing impediment, nothing was accomplished. They were encouraged to live good lives, attend Mass, and say their prayers. In six cases the parents consented to have their children baptized and permission was granted from the proper authority, with certain promises involved.

The pastor of St. John's felt that something was needed to insure a strong family bond and to spiritualize married life. In so doing, possible divorces and separation cases could be avoided in the future. The answer to this need was found in different but related activities.

Feeling that this bond must be strengthened in the home, through

Christ, the priests strongly urged family prayer.

As Christ said: "Where there are two or three gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them" (St. Matthew 28:20).

The Reverend John A. O'Brien, in his pamphlet about home life, says:

The experience of the Church the world over testifies abundantly to the enormous influence of this custom in preserving the faith intact, in stimulating Christians to lives of virtue and holiness, and in keeping alive in them the consciousness of the abiding presence of God in their lives.³

To foster family prayer, the priests urged the daily recitation of the family Rosary. During the month of October large booklets containing pictures and meditations were sold after all of the Sunday Masses. These booklets were printed under the auspices of the Holy Name Society and were very suitable for family use during the vocal recitation of the Rosary. Many families responded to the Rosary Crusade and some went so far as to establish a "Block Rosary" in their neighborhood. This idea consisted of all the families in one block meeting on a specified evening each week and reciting the Rosary. Every week the meeting was held at a different home, until each one had a turn, and then it started over again. This procedure lasted only fifteen or twenty minutes, since there was no social activity in connection with it.

Pope Pius IX often said, "In the whole of the Vatican there is no greater treasure than the Rosary."⁴ He was very anxious that the Rosary be recited daily in every home.

³God in the Home, The Paulist Press, New York, 1943, 25.

⁴Ibid., 25.

Within the knowledge of the priests, there were fifteen Block Rosary groups in existence one month after the idea was suggested. There was no accurate check on the number of families saying the daily Rosary, but from the sale of the booklets it was believed that many families were taking part in the family Rosary.

Another move to help Christianize the home and family was the Cana Conference and the Christian Family Movement. The purpose of the Cana movement is to provide spiritual counsel for married couples and to stress the principles of Christian home life. The first conference was conducted in October of 1951. It was very well attended and many couples expressed their desire for another conference at a later date.

One result of the Cana Conference was an active interest in the Christian Family Movement. This movement carries out the principles of the Christian living learned at Cana. Each group is made up of six married couples who meet at prescribed times.

An idea which grew and developed out of one Christian Family group was the idea of an anniversary Mass once a year for each married couple. It was suggested to the pastor and it met with his wholehearted approval. He would offer a High Mass on the anniversary day and it would be at a time when most of the family could be present. Cards were printed on which were asked the necessary questions. These cards were distributed after the Masses on Sunday. This idea was met with much enthusiasm and the response was very gratifying. The priests said that in most instances the anniversary Masses were well attended by friends and neighbors of the couple as well as by the

immediate family and relatives.

To foster and stabilize Catholic marriages among the younger members of the parish, arrangements were made for Pre-Cana Conferences, one in the fall and one in the spring. The purpose of the Pre-Cana Conference is to provide young couples contemplating marriage the proper instruction needed for a firm Christian marriage. Notices were published in the weekly bulletin much in advance of the Conference. The sessions were well attended and it was felt that the young parishioners were anxious to receive helps and proper instructions for good Christian marriages.

Pope Pius XI has said:

Let, then, those who are about to enter on married life, approach that state well disposed and well prepared, so that they will be able, as far as they can, to ehlp each other in sustaining the vicissitudes of life, and yet more in attending to their eternal salvation and in forming the inner man unto the fullness of the age in Christ.⁵

When the pastor discovered from the survey report the large number of children in attendance at public schools he organized instruction classes for them. Since all of the children could not attend classes during the week, a Sunday class was organized. Classes for the grade school children were held on Tuesday afternoon in the parish school and were conducted by the Sisters. After a two-year instruction period, and regular attendance, the children are permitted to receive their first Holy Communion or Confirmation, whichever one they are preparing for.

⁵ Pope Pius XI, Casti Connubii, The Paulist Press, New York, 1930, 37.

Instruction classes for the high school children were conducted by one of the assistants every Tuesday evening, from seven to eight o'clock. These classes were not as well attended as the grade school classes.

From the interviews made by the Sisters conducting the survey, there was only one case of illness to which the priests were not bringing the sacraments. As a matter of fact, the attention given to the sick of the parish was most unusual and highly praised by the parishioners. The one instance which was not being serviced was the result of a misunderstanding and a priest from a neighboring parish, with the pastor's knowledge, was performing the services.

The three assistants were in charge of visiting and ministering to the sick. The youngest assistant had thirty-five to whom he brought the Blessed Sacrament once every month. The second assistant had twenty-four and the third had twenty-two. Not all of these were permanently ill.

The church and society must work together. Therefore, the pastor and his assistants felt the need of parish activities outside the ones already in operation, such as the Knights of Columbus, the Holy Name Society, Ladies Sodality, and the Altar and Rosary Society. These answered the needs of the parishioners above high school and college level. The social needs of all the parishioners must be met and there must be unity and cooperation among the laity and the priests. Pope Pius XII stated this goal clearly, when he said:

The collaboration of the laity with the priesthood in all classes, categories and groups reveals precious industry and to the laity is entrusted a mission than which noble and loyal hearts could desire none higher nor more consoling. The apostolic work, carried out according to the mind of the Church, consecrates the laymen

as a kind of minister to Christ.⁶

Realizing the advantages and the necessity of organizing the youth of the parish, the priests decided on a definite social program. They planned to organize an "All Hi Club" and a "Young People's Club".

At all the Sunday Masses it was announced that a meeting would be held on the following Wednesday in the parish hall to make plans for the organization of a "Young People's Club". The announcement was met with a good response for there were 85 at the first meeting. Plans were made to elect officers at the next meeting and each person present was asked to bring a companion to that meeting.

Several successful meetings followed the second one at which officers were elected and a social and spiritual program planned for the year. It was decided that the members would receive Holy Communion once a month and have a breakfast in the parish hall after Mass. They were to have one recollection day in the fall and one in the spring. Their social life was to consist of a dance every Sunday evening, a formal dance at Christmas time, picnics during the summer, and one barn dance in the fall. The second year of the Club's organization they had a dramatic club and produced a play under the direction of the priest who was their sponsor. They made enough money to cover the expenses of the play and pay tuition to a Catholic high school for some child who was attending public school.

Since this organization met with such success, the anticipated "All

⁶Pope Pius XII, Summi Pontificatus, The Paulist Press, New York,

Hi Club" was started. This club held its first meeting three months after the "Young People's Club" was begun. There was more difficulty in organizing this group, because of school differences. Some of the members were in public schools and the others in Catholic schools. Most of these difficulties were overcome through the instruction class, since the same priest had charge of both groups and understood youth very well. Before too long, there was a good attendance at the meetings and boys and girls from public high were taking active part in the club activities. These activities consisted of a Friday night dance twice a month (to which no outsiders were admitted), picnics every third Sunday in the summer, baby sitters who minded children at three of the Masses on Sunday, and receiving Holy Communion every first Friday and Saturday of the month.

The results of both of these social groups were most apparent. Children from Catholic homes who were attending public high school were provided with companions of their own religion, they kept in contact with the priests of their parish, and they were being prepared for a future in a Catholic home as a father or mother.

Pope Pius XI points out:

For it cannot be denied that the basis of a happy wedlock, and the ruin of an unhappy one, is prepared and set in the souls of boys and girls during the period of childhood and adolescence.⁷

Children of grammar school age had a very nice social and civic training program provided for them through Scouting. In St. John's Parish

⁷Pope Pius XI, Ibid., 37.

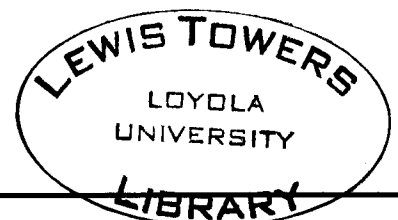
there are four troops of Cub Scouts which are supervised by the boys' mothers and which meet in the different homes for their meetings. There are three very active Boy Scout Troops. The men of the parish have charge of these troops and they take the boys on overnight hikes and to camps in the summertime.

There are five troops of Brownies for the girls who are too young to be Scouts. The leaders of these troops are mothers of some of the girls. They hold weekly meetings in the school hall and have programs for their parents twice a year. There are four Girl Scout Troops, which are also under the direction of the girls' mothers. They have weekly meetings in the school hall and attend camp in the summer. Through these groups the children are given ample opportunity for social life and training in good citizenship. All of the girls' troops receive Holy Communion in a body on the first Saturday of every month. They attend the annual retreat for Catholic Girl Scouts, which is held after the close of school in June.

The fathers of boys in St. John's Parish have organized an athletic program which is sponsored by the men of the Holy Name Society. In this way the boys are under supervised play outside of school hours. Baseball teams were the first to be organized. Each team reported for practice on the school playground one evening a week. After they were sufficiently well organized, a league was formed and they played against each other. This program continued until baseball season ended.

During the fall and winter months a similar program was conducted for football and basketball. In this way a year-round program of supervised sports was in operation for the boys between the ages of eleven and fourteen.

As has been told, the majority of activities in St. John's Parish were established after the parish survey had been taken. The results spoke for themselves. As has been seen, these needs were met through the close cooperation and unity between the laity and the priesthood. Without this unity the priests and parishioners would not be able to meet with success in any undertaking which was for the interest of the parish. Working "hand in hand" has produced good fruitage.



CHAPTER IV

EVALUATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey reports did not reveal St. John's to be an ideal norm of parish life. Such a parish would have no invalid marriages and no mixed marriages, all of the children would be baptized, those of school age would be enrolled in the parish school, and every particular parishioner would be faithful to his religious duties. All religious conditions would be ideal.¹

Since St. John's was not the ideal parish, the survey revealed situations which are in existence in many city parishes. No startling facts were unfolded, nor did the priests meet with amazing success in their efforts toward rehabilitation. It is believed however, that the report was intelligently interpreted and very definite and timely measures were taken to meet the existing needs and to alleviate the spiritual miseries of the parishioners.

Since marriage cases contributed to a high per cent of the leakage, it is only to be expected that definite steps be taken to provide a panacea for such ills. They realized that unless the home is what it should be, their efforts to reinstate the parish life would be futile.

The breakdown in Catholic homes is an outstanding cause of parish

¹ Nussse and Harte, Ibid., 263.

leakage. In the home where there was an invalid marriage, there was much to be desired from a Catholic standpoint. Children were being reared in the very atmosphere of divorce. Too frequently both parents were parties to a second marriage. It is sad but true that many of our Catholic parents need religious instruction far more than their children. This would be one means to stem the leak in Peter's barque.²

The Church must use every means in her power to unite her children and bring them closer to Christ. With the establishment of a true Christian spirit will come a true family spirit. Since the family is the parish in miniature, the ills of the family are parish ills and must be cured at the parish level by the apostolate of priest and people. Religion must be united to life; there must be co-existence between them. In order to achieve this, the family must be in an atmosphere where it can work out its destiny with other families in the community pursuing the same ends, and free from the fetters of material needs or a pagan environment anxious to corrupt it. Families, under their own leadership and that of the priest, can work out their God-given destiny by being united in an organized way with each performing its own particular function. These organized groups may take various forms: an employment service, a maternity guild, funds for the poor, planning for Cane Conferences and retreats for married couples, marriage preparation for the young, and visiting new parishioners. These groups may be large or small,

² Thomas F. Coakley, "Catholic Leakage: A Factual Study", The Catholic World, CLIV, The Office of the Catholic World, N.Y., 425.

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on an economic, religious, or political level.

In a recent article by the Reverend Edgar Schmiedeler, he stressed the importance of the Church's interest in the Christian family:

It cannot be surprising that the church is interested in the apostolate of the family. The welfare of both Church and State is most intimately bound up with the welfare of the family. A¹ strong family unit means a vigorous nation, a thriving church.⁴

What a child becomes depends strongly upon the influences which surround his early years in the family circle. For grown-ups, too, the family is important. It is the medium through which many must attain their eternal happiness. The family apostolate is an organized effort to help build a strong and genuinely Christian family life.

In St. John's parish the need for adult religion education was aided greatly by their "Information Club". Poorly instructed parents and non-Catholic parents who were parties to a mixed marriage attended the meetings, and it was felt that the results would be very satisfying and apparent in the future life of the home and the parish.

Parents who have not had the privilege of a Catholic education and non-Catholic parents cannot be expected to rear their children in the same light of Faith and in the same principles of Christian living as those parents who are products of a firm Catholic education and have been blessed in Christian marriage. It was for the assistance of the former that this club was formed, although anyone wishing could attend.

³ Reverend John Egan, "Resources of the Parish for Building Up Family Life", National Conference of Catholic Charities, Washington, D.C., 1952, 42.

⁴ "Philadelphia to Spotlight the Family", Catholic Action, XXIV, No. 3, 4 - 5.

It was evident from the response which the club received that a program such as the club offered was needed in St. John's. In all probability it would be equally successful in other parishes.

Another result of the club was an added interest in the Christian Doctrine classes for children attending the public schools. These classes are a necessity and if they are to be successful, there must be cooperation from the parents. Parents who attended the meetings of the Information Club realized the need for the religious instruction of their children. The classes were not always perfect in attendance, but the results of a program are not usually evidenced immediately. In several instances it was noted that after attending Catechism Classes several youngsters expressed the desire to attend the parish school. Over a period of two years, nine children of grammar school age enrolled in St. John's parish school.

Another means of providing instructions for adults in building a strong Catholic Home is the Cana Movement. Cana is a positive attempt to aid Catholic couples in the problems they meet in their married life.

When Bishop Martin McNamara of Joliet, Illinois, addressed the fourth annual meeting of diocesan leaders of the Cana Conferences, he praised the work of Cana. His Excellency said that although this Movement is not a cure-all for the problems affecting modern marriage and family life, it is an attempt to help Catholic couples realize the "satisfaction, the worthwhileness, and the joy of a Christian marriage lived according to the pattern of Christ can be".⁵

⁵"Cana Conference Priests Convene", The New World, Chicago, Illinois, LXI, No. 15, April 13, 1953, 13.

It has been stated, and rightly so, that the Cana Movement reaches the minority and those involved in marriage difficulties are not among them. This being true, it can also be said that many broken homes and marriages have been avoided as a result of Cana. Then, too, through such a program the divorce rate and the rate of broken homes in the future will in all probability be greatly lessened.

Every parish should not only consider, but provide a time in its schedule of parish events for a yearly Cana Conference. Experience has shown that in the majority of instances, partners in marriage are anxious to receive and willing to accept advice and suggestions which will make their home more like the Home of Nazareth.

As the author of The Home and Its Inner Spiritual Life states, "When the Christian home is what it should be, it is a school of sanctity".⁶

The need still exists, and to a great degree, of educating young couples in the duties of marriage and training them to face and accept the responsibilities and problems of married life. They need to be guided in planning their lives, to build homes on good Catholic principles, to realize their sacred duties and to live up to them.

This duty rests partially with the priests. One means of supplying this need is through the Pre-Cana Conferences. The pastor of St. John's had a series of these conferences conducted in the parish hall. They were well attended and the young members of the parish expressed their interest and

⁶A Carthusian of Miraflores, The Newman Press, Maryland, 1952, 8.

appreciation of them.

Another need which rests with the priests, and with the sisters engaged in teaching in the parish school, is to provide the proper contacts for young men and women who are interested in the religious life. After girls leave the parish school, their contact with the sisters is often broken. Many times it would seem that certain girls give evidence of being blessed with a religious vocation. In such instances a group of these girls could be brought together to help with secretarial work for the school or in the parish house. Another means of contact would be to have them assist in caring for the altars. In some high schools Vocation Clubs have been formed for those interested in learning about religious life. Similar clubs could be formed on a parish level with the understanding that young people joining such clubs would be under no obligation to the priesthood or sisterhood.

Occasions should be provided through parish societies and clubs for the unmarried parishioners to make Catholic acquaintances. The pastor must realize this responsibility.

In Dr. Paul Hanley Furfey's article on "Standards for Parish Clubs", he discussed the importance and vital part such programs play in the life of the parish. The parish clubs must function, especially for the youth of the parish, if the future of the parish is to be effective. He further contends that the parish club is the most effective recreational group in the parish.⁷

The Catholic Club has been compared to a pillar upon which rests the

⁷ Ecclesiastical Review, 76, No. 1, January 1927, 27.

integrity of the coming generation and herein lies our hope for the future. The more the Church gets into the daily lives of her people, the more likely it is that they will become animated by her spirit.⁸

Well regulated clubs must be carefully planned, well organized, and supervised. At the beginning of each season, there should be a basic program of traditional activities planned with the parishioners.⁹

St. John's parish fulfilled the requirements of providing clubs for their youth by the Young Peoples' Club and the All-Hi Club. The young people felt the need and expressed the desire for such activities.

The Catholic Church has many such programs which, if carried out to their full capacity, provide our youth with all the social life necessary for their well-being. A parish with an active program for its youth is building toward a strong parish future. Whatever problems may confront the Church, as long as she retains her influence on the young, she need have no fear of the future.

Whether our community be large or small in population the same principle prevails, we must sanctify our youth through the strengthening of the grace of God in their souls. No program for youth has fulfilled its purpose unless it has brought our boys and girls, young men and women, closer to the

⁸Paul Hanley Furfey, Parish and Play, Dolphin Press, Philadelphia, 1928, 20.

⁹Brother Gerald Schnepf, "How Stem the Leakage", Catholic Charities Review, XXVI, No. 7, September 1942, 15.

heart of Christ. This program has been considered of such importance that the hierarchy, the archbishops and bishops of the United States, have set up a Youth Department in connection with the National Catholic Welfare Council.¹⁰

A well rounded plan of every Catholic Youth Organization must embrace a recreational, social, cultural and spiritual program in its activities. No matter how successful the basketball team, the dance, or the dramatic group may be, they are failures unless they lead our youth all the way, that is to say, to the priest, the sacraments, and to instill in them a strong love for their faith so that it stimulates their every action.¹¹

The author of Youth in a Catholic Parish, after interviewing many of the parish youth, discusses the importance of youth activities. He says that young people feel a need for security and this need should be found in each one's own home parish.¹²

Through these clubs leadership is discovered, religious acquaintances are made, and very often their activities effect the community as well as the life of the parish. They likewise teach the young parishioners a spirit of self-sacrifice for the Church and in particular for their own parish. With such programs in existence and operating to their fullest measure, there will

¹⁰ Reverend F. C. Ott, "Youth Apostolate and a Diocesan Program for Parish Clubs", Proceedings of the 27th Meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Charities, Washington, D.C., 196 - 204.

¹¹ Ibid., 198.

¹² Brother Augustus McCaffrey, F.S.C., Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1942, 40 - 46.

be no reason for our young people seeking membership in the "Y". Neither will they find a need to attend social events sponsored by a non-sectarian organization.

It has often been said that the world is placing its hopes in the youth of today. This fact is not only true but vitally important. It is our duty to supply the world with the leaders of tomorrow. If we are going to supply them, we must train them. The interest of the Catholic Church in her children has not stopped the the church door. Anything that affects the child's welfare at home, in school, or out of school is of importance in the eyes of the Catholic Church. This is the primary reason for the parochial school -- schools in which characters are formed for this world and for heaven. The school and the parish club are the two agencies aside from purely religious features through which the Church maintains a hold on her young.¹³

To summarize the Church's work in this regard we turn to the establishment of such organizations as the C.Y.O., the Young Christian Worker, and the Scouting program.

The C.Y.O. and the Y.C.W., though diocesan, may be sponsored and function on a parish level. The C.Y.O. provides opportunity for developing physical skill through athletics and it also provides social life for its members and their friends. One outstanding feature of the C.Y.O. in Chicago is the exceptional recreational program which it conducts during the summer vacation months at the various community centers and city parks. During the scholastic year a course of instruction is given to potential C.Y.O. leaders

¹³ Furfey, Ibid., 1 - 2.

in their vacation schools.

Through Y.C.W. the young Christian worker is trained to exercise among his fellow associates in the working field a healthy Catholic example and live an exemplary life. In this group the young worker can exercise his potentialities for leadership. This group is meeting with success and operates on a parish basis.

Through Scouting the boy and girl has many advantages to develop wholesome character traits and to exert his qualities of leadership. Within each troop are patrols and one child is chosen to act as the leader under the direction of the troop leader. Under the supervision and mature guidance of an intelligent adult leader these patrol leaders can develop those qualities which will enable them to lead their groups in an orderly manner.

Social group activities for the adult members of the parish is also important. The social life of a parish plays an important part as being the meeting place for the poor and rich alike, all mingling on equal terms. Through these means the people learn to work together and to respect each other's rights. Without the leadership of a priest in such instances nothing can be accomplished to establish a union among all the parishioners and between priest and parishioner.¹⁴

Sociological research has shown that the American class structure in society plays an important part in group life. In an average city one can find at least six social classes. A person's class position influences all his

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A Carthusian of Miraflores, Ibid., 14.

aspects of life. It influences religious activities as well as others. Though most of this research showing the relationship between social class and religion has been in regard to the Protestant church, there is no reason to believe that such does not exist in the Catholic Church. Sisters making a parish survey have found this condition to be in existence in the average parish in a large city. All too frequently the people from the lowest economic class have become negligent in the practice of their religious duties because they feel "out of place" in their shabby attire.¹⁵

An effort must be made by the priests to integrate his people into the life of their parish in spite of their consciousness of class status. The missionary work of the Church will not succeed unless class barriers are destroyed.¹⁶

The parish fulfills various functions which are not within the limits of those specifically prescribed. It serves its members as an agency of ethnic, class or community integration and as a unit of sociability. Its services are those which relate to its status as an institution which serves as an organ of jurisdiction, education, and sanctification within the Church.¹⁷

Pope Pius XII, speaking at an anniversary celebration of a parish in Rome, called for a greater participation of the laity in the work of

¹⁵ Nuesse and Harte, Ibid., 312 - 314.

¹⁶ Ibid., 314.

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

Catholic associations.

. it is necessary that you priests, and the militant laymen together with all the faithful, form an efficient and hard working community, so that Jesus may be in the life of all souls. The Catholic Church will remain the model, the prototype of every Christian community, even the parish.¹⁸

His Holiness continued by comparing the parish to a family whose members live and work in fraternal charity. There must be unity and the people should have great respect for the various associations approved and blessed by the Church. He stressed the importance of unity and a spirit of true fraternity among the faithful. The chief aim of the parochial life is to work untiringly so Christ may be known to all. The center of this life is the parish.¹⁹

The clubs and activities which were in existence in St. John's parish have given evidence that this is one means, and a positive one, to form a closer union between the priests and parishioners and to exert a subtle, silent influence over their flock. The efforts of the priests of St. John's parish should be an example and an inspiration to all priests laboring toward the accomplishment of their task as a shepherd of souls.

His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, in his address, On Pastoral Care, reminds priests of their duties as pastors of souls:

We exhort you once more, as pastors of souls, not to restrict your zeal to those who of their own will take part in the life of the Church, but to seek out with no less ardor, the misguided ones who live away from the Church. Many, perhaps of them, may still be reached and called back on the right road. All depends upon establishing contact with them. Let the finding of those who alienated

¹⁸"Philadelphia to Spotlight the Family", Catholic Action, XXIV, No. 3, 3.

¹⁹Ibid., 19.

themselves from the Church, and the close association with the exhausted and oppressed, be the dominating aim of your thoughts, the secret and the heart of your sacerdotal and apostolic work.²⁰

The task of the apostle of Christ has remained essentially the same in every age. It is his duty to bring men to God and God to men. He must use every human means in his power for men because through God's mercy men need Him. The modern apostle will wonder how to avert the submergence of the Church today under the waves of unchristian thought. As he scans the horizons he cannot find them much more humanly impossible than the horizons scanned by the impatient, impetuous Peter. The apostle of the twentieth century has a much longer road to go than the length of all the roads of Rome. He has much farther to go because men have gone so much farther afield and the distance from man to man is very great.²¹

²⁰ The Catholic Mind, XLIV, 1002, June 1946, 321.

²¹ Walter Farrell, O.P., "Twentieth Century Apostle", The Thomist, Washington, D.C., X, April 1947, No. 2, 133 - 158.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters we have outlined a parish survey and have shown it to be an official enumeration of a parish by trained and experienced workers, with the view of determining the moral and religious status of the parish, and with the intent of correcting the evils found therein. An analysis of the results of the parish survey will clearly answer any ideas the average pastor may have with regard to the security of the members of his parish in Catholic ideals.

True, a parish survey is often a startling revelation to the individual pastor. It is hard from his standpoint to acknowledge the fact that his parish -- as is the usual case -- could have so many defections, could have so many nominal Catholics. But once the accumulation of that data has been made and the interpretation of its findings evaluated, a parish survey can prove to be invaluable.

In the case of St. John's parish, the pastor found weaknesses and, upon recognizing them, took the proper measures to strengthen the parish and brought those who had strayed back to the Faith. By organizing and expanding the facilities which will combat the menace of secularism among the parishioners, the ground work for strengthening Holy Mother Church has begun.

The survey was the initial step to bring the parishioner and the

pastor on a more solid ground, a closer bond. After this contact had been made the social and spiritual life of the parishioner were greatly enhanced. By increasing the social life of the members of the parish (not only those who had defected, but also the fervent Catholics) the parish may again become the focal point towards guiding them to return to God. By showing that interest in the brotherhood of man, and giving it the practical meaning for which it was intended, all men are placed upon the common ground of mankind because they are on the Christian ground -- the ground of Holy Mother Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.

As is apparent from the material in the foregoing chapters, the priests in St. John's were successful in their efforts to correct the existing ills among their parishioners. Their results were not perfect but the cooperation they received from their parishioners was most gratifying. They did not cure all the prevailing evils, nor did they succeed in bringing all the nominal Catholics back to the fold, but with continued efforts on their part many of the causes for leakage which were apparent in the last survey will appear in a lesser degree in the future.

The necessity of close cooperation and sympathy between pastor and people is a requirement if the ends for which the parish was established are to be accomplished.

The final analysis of the parish survey can only lend to the conclusion that the parishioner of today proposes a far more difficult task for instruction and guidance than in former years. In the ever-changing world of today, the people, because they are more widely read, because of the ever increasing methods employed by paganism, require more interest on the part of

the parish priest than was shown by his predecessors. The parish priest of today must not only compete with the eloquent speakers of the radio but must also combat the constant flow of reading material, lectures, and study clubs projected by unchristian influences. Paganism has all the natural advantages, but the Catholic Church has the supernatural advantages, and it is the parish priest on whom the Church leans and depends to propel these advantages to the faithful.

A study of the trend towards laxity among members of the Church will impress those in charge with the need of well directed social and spiritual work among its members. This interest must be founded and employed by the parish priest. The same interest must be shown in regard to economic and spiritual life. In many parishes there is an insurance set-up in which the parishioners may have an interest. Knowing the occupation of the individual heads of families is an advantage both to the pastor and to the men of the parish. To make this more specific, electricians, plumbers, plasterers, painters, carpenters, etc., when needed should be chosen from among the parishioners. This not only eventually tends toward a friendly and cooperative spirit between priest and people, but affords the parishioner an opportunity to perform work for his parish and to aid him economically as well.

By evincing an interest in the social life of the parishioners, the pastor will readily find that they will become more interested in their own spiritual life. And the parish survey will prove to the pastor to be the most important factor in acquainting the parish pastor with the situation in his parish and the needed steps to be taken to correct the flaws.

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